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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, school-based approaches to remediating deficits in social competence have focused on building aspects of temperament and character. The Socially Adept Verbalizations of Youth (SAVY) Curriculum, consisting of a series of exercises and activities, preceded by brief introductory lessons, was designed to develop social judgment skills in socially incompetent youths by decreasing egocentrism and by heightening their perspective-taking skills. To collect preliminary validation data on the curriculum, 17 adolescent students with behavior problems, who were attending an alternative inner city high school, were exposed to the SAVY curriculum as a 2-week module emphasizing social foresight, i.e., anticipating the consequences to oneself of various interpersonal actions. A control group (N=15) participated in the regular mental health course without the SAVY curriculum. A teacher-rated, modified version of the Acting Out, Moodiness, and Learning (AML) checklist was used to assess effects of the curriculum on behavioral adjustment. An analysis of the results showed that the experimental group demonstrated significantly greater rated behavioral improvement than the control group. This finding suggests that social foresight training may be of potential benefit in school-based intervention programs aimed at adolescents with behavior problems. (Author/BL)

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DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION OF A SOCIAL FORESIGHT CURRICULUM FOR AT-RISK YOUTH

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Social Foresight Training

Abstract

This paper describes the development and evaluation of a "judgment-oriented" intervention intended to increase the school adjustment of socially incompetent adolescents. Seventeen students attending an alternative inner-city high school were exposed to a two-week curriculum emphasizing "social foresight" skills (anticipating the consequences to oneself of various interpersonal actions). Following completion of the program, these students were contrasted with 15 comparable Control students on a teacher rating of behavioral improvement. In line with our hypothesis, the Experimental group demonstrated significantly greater rated behavioral improvement, suggesting that social foresight training may be of potential benefit in school-based intervention programs aimed at adolescents with behavior problems.

Effects of Social Foresight Training

on the School Adjustment of High-Risk Youth

School-based approaches to remediating deficits in social competence can be characterized according to the particular aspect of competence that is being remediated. A tripartite model of social competence developed by Greenspan (1979; in press a, b) may serve to illustrate this point. The three aspects of social competence identified in that model are "temperament" (emotional and attentional stability), "character" (degree of prosocial orientation), and "judgment"[3] (understanding of others). Temperament-oriented interventions attempt to help youth to acquire greater insight into their emotional response patterns and to acquire greater self-control. Included in this category are psychodynamically-oriented therapy and casework (Eissler, 1949; Guttman, 1970; Redl & Wineman, 1957), as well as much of the recent work in cognitive behavior modification (Camp, Blom, Hebert, & van Doorninck, 1977; McCullough, Huntsinger, & Nay, 1977; William & Akamatsu, 1978). Character-oriented treatments attempt to help youth to increase their rates of prosocial behavior and decrease their rates of antisocial behavior. Included in this category is the work of behavior therapists using reinforcement techniques, such as the token economy (Phillips, Wolf, Fixsen, & Bailey, 1975), as well as much of the work in "social skills" training which utilizes social learning techniques such as modeling, role-playing and social reinforcement to increase the frequency of prosocial behaviors (Bornstein, Bellack, & Hersen, 1980; Osberg, 1982; Sarason, 1968, 1973; Sarason & Ganzer, 1973; Reid & Patterson, 1976).

Judgment-oriented treatments are intended to help youth to acquire a better understanding of othe. people and of human relationships. Included in this category is work on training perspective-taking (Chandler, 1973; Chandler, Greenspan, & Barenboim, 1974) and moral judgment (Jurkovic, 1980; Selman, 1974; Selman & Jacquette, 1977). Also eligible for inclusion as a judgment-oriented mode of intervention is the recent work, much of it by community psychologists, on training "social problem-solving" skills in children (Gesten, Flores de Apodaca, Rains, Weissberg, & Cowen, 1979; McClure, Chinsky, & Larcen, 1978; Shure & Spivack, 1979, 1980; Weissberg, Gesten, Rapkin, Cowen, Davidson, Flores de Apodaca, & McKim, 1981).

Categorizing interventions in terms of the aspect of social competence targeted for remediation may, like all such classificatory efforts, be overly simplistic in that few interventions are restricted in focus solely to only one of the three dimensions. Furthermore, even when an intervention is so restricted there may be indirect spillover into one or more of the other social competence categories. Nevertheless, the taxonomy serves a three-fold heuristic function in that: (a) it enables one to differentiate between interventions which are described with the same label (e.g., "social skill training") but which may focus on different aspects of social competence, (b) it provides a preliminary basis for developing individualized treatments designed to remediate the specific type of social competence deficit believed to underly a youth's behavior problems, and (c) it may serve to point out directions for future research and program development. This latter argument serves as a point of departure for the study reported in this paper, as it becomes obvious from any review of the social competence intervention literature that far less effort has gone into the development and evaluation of judgment-oriented interventions than

into interventions which focus on temperament or character (cf. Collingwood & Genthner, 1980; Stumphauzer, 1973; Amos & Wellford, 1967; Wright & Dixon, 1977).

The central objective of judgment-oriented interventions has been, appropriately, to reduce the "egocentrism" of socially incompetent youth (Selman, 1980). It has been argued that youth with behavior problems have difficulty taking into account the perspectives of others (Chandler, 1973) and in evaluating their own actions from the standpoint of the general needs of society (Selman, 1980). Interventions have been designed to increase perspective-taking or social reasoning ability, with the expectation that any such general increase would also result in improvements in social adjustment. For example, in a study by Chandler, Greenspan, and Barenboim (1974), emotionally disturbed youth in a residential setting received either perspective-taking training utilizing sociodramatic play combined with video-feedback and discussion (described in Chandler, 1973) or referential communication training utilizing communication games involving the coordination of perspectives (described in Greenspan, Burka, Zlotlow, & Barenboim, 1975). Although both interventions succeeded in dramatically reducing levels of tested egocentrism, neither intervention succeeded in increasing youths' rated adjustment more than that of youth in a no-treatment control group. While these findings conflicted with those of an earlier study by Chandler (1973) in which perspective-taking training was successful in reducing arrest rates in predelinquent youth, the possibility exists that in order for reductions in cognitive egocentrism to be translated into reductions in socially unacceptable behavior, youth need to become persuaded that an increased sensitivity to and awareness of others' psychological states can work to their own advantage. For example,

Goldstein, Sherman, Gershaw, Sprafkin, and Glick (1978) pointed out that a barrier to delinquents' use of newly learned prosocial problem-solving tactics in conflict situations was their belief that they would lose face by doing so.

A key to increasing the likelihood that youth will use newly-acquired social judgment skills to deal effectively with inter-personal situations may be to demonstrate to them how the use of such skills will enable them to emerge from confrontations as "winners" rather than "losers." For example, if one can demonstrate that talking back to a police officer is more likely to result in a loss rather than a gain in dignity and other desired objectives (such as freedom), and that perspective-taking can enable one to not only stay out of trouble, but show superior "smartness" in mastering a difficult situation, then youth may be more likely to respond to policemen in respectful ways. The secret of designing an effective judgment-oriented training program may, therefore, be to harness the narcissism and fragile self-esteems of many adolescents by showing them how perspective-taking will make them more effective and "cool" manipulators of others. While there is some risk that such an approach will result not in a diminution of unacceptable behavior but only in a lessened likelihood of getting in trouble, it is our view that the positive effects of such attitudinal and social judgment changes will generally far outweigh the negative.

The current paper reports an attempt to develop, and collect preliminary validation data for, a school-based social judgment curriculum intended to decrease egocentrism and increase the adjustment of socially incompetent inner-city youth. The central social judgment construct underlying the development of this curriculum is what Johnson, Greenspan,

and Brown (note 1) referred to as "social foresight," a construct which may be defined as the ability to anticipate the interpersonal consequences of one's actions. Social foresight may be considered a variant of perspective-taking, similar to what Stotland (1969) called "predictive empathy," in that one needs to be able to put oneself in the shoes of another if one is to accurately anticipate how he/she will react to a given interpersonal tactic. In constructing the SAVY Curriculum, we utilized the social foresight paradigm in most of the training exercises, because of our two-fold belief that: (a) culturally disadvantaged youth frequently get into trouble unintentionally due to an inability to anticipate accurately how other people, particularly authority figures, will respond, and (b) such youth can grasp readily how social foresight might give them a strategic edge in encounters with peers and adults. As can be inferred from the above, the SAVY Curriculum contains an equal emphasis on building social judgment skills and on convincing youth that the use of such skills is in their own long-term interests.

This initial field-testing of the curriculum was conducted in an alternative school for culturally disadvantaged youth, a large percentage of whom had been expelled or suspended from previous schools, many of whom had histories of arrest and/or psychiatric treatment, and virtually all of whom are at-risk for becoming socially ineffective adults. The SAVY Curriculum, which can be used in various settings and formats, was here conducted as a two-week module within a nine-week course on mental health issues. Although so brief an exposure to the curriculum is not an optimal test of the potential effectiveness of social foresight training, it was, nevertheless, hypothesized that youth exposed to this treatment would show greater improvements in rated behavioral adjustment than would youth

participating in the mental health course without being exposed to the SAVY Curriculum. Such findings would, if obtained, provide encouraging support for the view that judgment-oriented interventions involving a social foresight focus may have potential utility as a means for helping socially incompetent youth to acquire more acceptable patterns of interpersonal behavior.

Method

Subjects

The subjects in this study all attended a small (total enrollment of approximately 200) private alternative high school located in the inner city of Omaha, Nebraska. Although founded by Catholic clergy and operated (until a 1980 merger with Father Flanagan's Boys' Home) by the Catholic archdiocese, over two-thirds of the student body is non-Catholic while approximately 50% is non-white. Most of the students attending this school (known since 1980 as the "Boys Town Urban Program") may be considered "high-risk" in that the majority of them, in addition to coming from poverty-culture backgrounds, have a multitude of additional problems such as: chemical dependency, disorganized and abusive family situations, police and juvenile court involvements, psychiatric disorders, and low academic achievement (note 2). Most of the students posed serious discipline and attendance problems in previous schools, with many of them having been suspended or expelled on multiple occasions.

The current field test of the SAVY Curriculum was conducted within the framework of one of the school's support programs, a nine-week "mental health" course taught by the school's director of Social Services. Although enrollment in the mental health course was voluntary, the school's

guidance counselor typically encouraged students who were having adjustment difficulties to enroll. Of the 32 students who constituted the final sample in this study, nine were in the ninth grade, twelve in the tenth grade, seven in the eleventh grade and four in the twelfth grade. Since many of the students had earned few credits in previous schools, the grade designations did not translate meaningfully into ages and there was less heterogeneity in ages that might be apparent. Although subjects ranged in age from 14 to 20, two-thirds of the subjects were one year older or younger than the mean age of 16.0. Of the 15 female subjects, six were black while nine were white; of the 17 male subjects, 7 were black while 10 were white. A number of the subjects lived in group or foster homes, most used drugs and/or alcohol on a regular basis, and almost all of the subjects had behavior disorders which interfered with their ability to adapt to school and society.

Prodedure

As indicated in the preceding section, subjects were students enrolled in a "mental health" course which met for one hour per day over the course of a nine-week school term. The course was offered each quarter, with the intervention offered twice (with different groups), once during the first term (September-November) and once during the fourth term (March-May) of the 1980-1981 school year. Given the school's emphasis on small class size, the course was offered in two sections during each of the two quarters, with approximately ten students enrolled in each section. Assignment of students to each section was done randomly by the school's guidance counselor. For the class meeting in the first term, the earlier-meeting of the two sections was assigned to the Experimental condition (the

group exposed to the SAVY Curriculum) while the later-meeting section was assigned to the Control condition. This order of assignment was reversed for the two sections meeting during the fourth term. Thus, as much as was possible, assignment to the Experimental and Control conditions was done on a completely randomized basis.

The SAVY Curriculum was taught as a continuous two-week module within the framework of one of the two sections (the "Experimental" group) meeting during each of the two terms. The module commenced at the beginning of the fourth week of the mental health course and met one hour per day for ten consecutive class sessions. The Control group was exposed to the regular mental health course without the SAVY Curriculum. The primary focus of the mental health course was on drug and alcohol education with a secondary focus on understanding of self and of family relationships. A combination of lectures and group therapy-type methods was used. The Control group received a more expanded version of the mental health curriculum than did the Experimental group and also participated in considerably more group therapy-type sessions.

The teacher in charge of all four sections was the school's director of Social Services, a white female around 30 years of age. The first author (someone with similar demographic characteristics) acted as assistant teacher (playing a relatively inactive role) for all four Experimental and Control sections and attended all sessions throughout each nine-week course. During the period in which the SAVY Curriculum was taught in the two Experimental sections, however, the first author took over the primary classroom leadership role while the regular teacher played a relatively inactive role.

During the last (ninth) week of the term, each student's English or Reading teacher was asked to fill out a checklist, indicating the extent to which subjects had made positive or negative changes on 16 adjustment indices during the preceding nine weeks. While these teachers were aware that the students had been enrolled in the mental health course, they were blind to students' experimental status. Initially there were 23 students in each of the Experimental and Control conditions. A criterion of at least 50% attendance during the two weeks in which the SAVY curriculum was presented was used to constitute final membership in each group. Six subjects were dropped from the E group for this reason, while eight were dropped from the C group. Thus, 17 E subjects and 15 C subjects were used in the final analysis of the data.

The SAVY Curriculum

The SAVY (Socially Adept Verbalizations of Youth) Curriculum consists of a series of exercises and activities, preceded by brief introductory lessons, designed to foster better interpersonal judgment in socially incompetent youth. The main pedagogic technique used in the curriculum is a combination of group discussion and experiential learning, with approximately one dozen units dealing with different aspects of interpersonal problem-solving and communication. The intent of the curriculum is to make youth more likely to think of the possible interpersonal consequences of their actions, and to be able to evaluate alternative courses of action in terms of their likely effectiveness or ineffectiveness.

To accomplish this end, a series of twelve units have been developed (Brown & Greenspan, note 4). These units all involve some degree of focus

on "social foresight," i.e., on the ability to accurately forecast consequences of interpersonal actions. For example, Unit #6--"Say it Once, Say it Twice"--focused on non-verbal behavior such as gestures and vocal intonation and required students to stand in front of the class and say the same line (e.g., responding to a dinner invitation by saying, "Look, I have some other things to do") in two ways; one of which would, and the other of which wouldn't, upset the other person. Unit #9--"Social Roulette"--required students to predict the most likely consequences of various actions (e.g., telling a teacher you had lost your homework). Unit #10--"Early Birds Get Worms"--required students to decide which of three antecedent events were likely to have preceded a given interpersonal outcome. Unit 11--"How Much Dues?"--required students to predict the likelihood of being apprehended for various offenses (including offenses ranging from jaywalking to shoplifting and selling drugs). The purpose of this exercise was to help students learn to make more rational calculations of the consequences to themselves of potentially illegal activities.

Typically, the units were presented in sequence, with each unit taking approximately one class period. Although the curriculum was presented in a condensed fashion in this study, with only ten one-hour lessons compressed into a ten-day period, expansion of the curriculum is quite feasible. It would, in fact, be preferable to double or triple the number of contact hours, perhaps doing parts of the curriculum two or three times a week over the course of an entire semester or academic year. Such an expanded version of the curriculum is envisaged as a future possibility, one which would likely be a more effective form of intervention as well as being adaptable to a variety of settings and populations.

Behavior Rating Measure

A modified version of the AML checklist was used to assess effects of the SAVY Curriculum on behavioral adjustment. The AML is an 11-item rating instrument used extensively to detect school adjustment problems in children (Durlak, Stein, & Mannarino, 1980; Kirschenbaum, Marsh, & Devoge, 1977; Sandler, Duricko, & Grande, 1975). Although the AML was originally intended for use with younger children, it was pointed out by Dorr, Stephens, Pozner, and Klodt (1980) that the measure has been found to be quite useful with older children as well. For example, in a study utilizing a population similar in age to the current one, Greenspan and Barenboim (note 5) found that diminished egocentrism in delinquent adolescents correlated significantly with rated change on a revised version of the AML.

The revision used in the current study involved the addition of five items to the original eleven. The five new items all are designed to tap aspects of egocentric/nonegocentric behavior, e.g., "understands others' feelings," "is skillful in dealings with others," etc. The original scale contained one item dealing with learning difficulties, while the other ten items were equally divided into those assessing acting-out behavior (e.g., "gets into fights and quarrels with other students") and those assessing moodiness (e.g., "feels hurt when criticized"). Thus, the revised AML contained 16 items tapping various aspects of interpersonal adjustment of secondary school-age youth.

Whereas the 11 original items are all worded negatively (i.e., in terms of pathology), three of the five added items are worded positively. Besides thus expanding the item pool, an additional change was made in the AML format. Instead of asking teachers to rate a student "statically"

(i.e., by asking how well each item characterized him/her), we asked teachers to rate the degree of positive or negative change noticed for the student on each item during the nine-week quarter preceding the rating. The reason for utilizing a change index rather than a characteristic index to evaluate the impact of the SAVY Curriculum on school adjustment stems from our belief that such an approach forces teachers to focus less on students' personality continuities and more on recent improvements or regressions in adjustment. Such a modified method for evaluating changes on the AML was used successfully in a previous study by Chandler, Greenspan & Barenboim (1974).

A five-point scale was used, with a 1 indicating the youth had become "much less," a 2 indicating the youth had become "somewhat less," a 3 indicating the youth had not changed, a 4 indicating the youth had become "somewhat more," and a 5 indicating the youth had become "much more" like each of the 16 items during the weeks preceding the rating. In scoring the ratings, responses were transformed (taking into account whether or not item wording was positive or negative) such that a score of four or five indicated positive change (e.g., became less moody, more understanding) while a score of one or two indicated negative change (e.g., became more inconsiderate, less skillful). Thus, overall scores could range from a minimum score of 16 (indicating major regression) to a maximum score of 80 (indicating major improvement), with a mid-point score of 48 indicating no overall change. In this study, scores were summed across all 16 items and only total change scores were used. Although reliability data does not exist for the modified version of the AML used in this study, there is considerable evidence that the 11-item version has highly acceptable test-retest reliability (Durlak et al., 1980) and there is no reason to assume

that the addition of five new items would alter the scale's reliability appreciably.

Results

The data support the hypothesis that use of the SAVI Curriculum can increase the school adjustment of socially incompetent youth. The mean change for the experimental group (N = 17) was 52.24 (SD = 7.38), while the mean change score for the control group (N = 15) was 46.87 (SD = 9.78). The resulting t value was statistically significant ($t = 1.77$, $df = 30$, $p < .05$, one-tailed). Support for the assertion that social foresight training can meaningfully improve classroom adjustment is strengthened even further if one conducts the sort of statistical power analysis advocated by Cohen (1977). If one calculates the Effect Size index "d" by dividing the difference in mean scores on the modified AML between groups by their average standard deviation (8.5), the resulting score of .63 falls into the category of what Cohen (1977, p. 26) refers to as a "medium effect size." Thus, the importance of the finding that the experimental group changed significantly on rated adjustment is increased by the fact that there were relatively few subjects (N = 17, 15) in the two groups.

Another form of power analysis suggested by Cohen (1977) is to examine the degree of overlap between the two groups. If one divides the two samples at the grand mean of 49.72, which is slightly above the point (score of 48) which divides those rated as having improved from those rated as having regressed, and then examines the distribution of behavioral improvement scores in the two groups, the results are highly revealing. For the experimental group, the frequency of "good" (above the grand mean) behavioral improvement scores was 11 (out of an N of 17), while for the

control group the frequency of such scores was 4 (out of an N of 15). Thus, the Control subjects had a 27% chance of improving while the Experimental subjects had a 65% chance of improving, as rated by teachers blind to the students' experimental status.

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that social foresight training, in the form of the SAVY Curriculum, may be a useful addition to the armamentarium of methods intended to prevent or diminish the development in adolescents of socially maladaptive patterns of behavior. Social foresight training represents a different emphasis from other psychoeducational treatment approaches currently in vogue. Unlike social skills training programs intended to build aspects of "character" such as prosocial behavior, the purpose of social foresight training is to help youth to avoid engaging in antisocial or interpersonally offensive behaviors. In this sense, social foresight training is similar in intent to the stress-management approach which Meichenbaum and other cognitive behaviorists (Little & Kendall, 1979) have developed to help youth acquire greater control over their impulsive tendencies. Unlike such "temperament"-oriented approaches, however, in which the focus is on helping youth to acquire greater understanding and control of their internal response mechanisms, the focus of social foresight training is on increasing youths' ability to predict how others might react to their behaviors. Such a "judgment"-oriented approach attempts to capitalize on, rather than change, the narcissistic tendencies of difficult youth by giving them greater insight into the ways in which impulsive or antisocial behaviors may work to their own disadvantage.

That the SAVY Curriculum had a significant impact on rated social adjustment is especially noteworthy in light of the relatively small sample size, the time-limited nature of the intervention, and the short amount of elapsed time between the intervention and the evaluation. It is possible that a more lengthy exposure to the curriculum might have had an even greater impact on the students' adjustment. Given the difficulties involved in changing established patterns of perceiving and interacting with others, it would undoubtedly be preferable in future replications to conduct the training over a longer time frame than the two weeks used in this study.

The potential utility of the SAVY Curriculum in educational and therapeutic settings was enhanced by the fact that the majority of the students appeared to genuinely enjoy their participation in the exercises. Thinking about how their behavior might impact on others is an activity which most adolescents, given their concerns over popularity and group acceptance, appear to relish. Youth who have demonstrated consistent difficulties in the realm of interpersonal relationships can be expected to be no less eager to think about such matters. The anecdotal finding that many of the participants got apparent enjoyment from the SAVY Curriculum lends support to our earlier contention that social foresight training has the advantage of "plugging into" the abundant narcissism of such youth.

It has been noted that many acting-out adolescents seem to spontaneously "settle down" in adulthood as a result of maturational processes (Robins, 1974). Assuming that the acquisition of better social foresight plays an important role in explaining how such maturation occurs, it may be argued that the promising thing about social foresight training (as with other judgment-oriented interventions) is its focus on

facilitating naturally-occuring developmental processes, something which is presumably easier to do than to change someone's underlying character structure or temperamental tendencies. Nevertheless, it would be naive to assume that social foresight training (even in an expanded and more refined form than the current experimental curriculum) is the "answer" to preventing or treating delinquency or psychopathology. Social judgment is only one of the factors contributing to effective interpersonal behavior, a statement which implies: (a) that some youth (whose problems are rooted mainly in temperamental or characterological deficits) are not likely to benefit from social foresight training, and (b) that a multi-modal form of intervention is likely to be the most effective strategy. Nevertheless, the results of this study suggest that greater attention should be paid to the potential utility of social foresight training as a means for helping socially incompetent youth to become better adjusted members of society.

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Footnotes

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[3]In previous publications by the second author, this third aspect of social competence was referred to as either "social intelligence" (Greenspan, 1977) or "social awareness" (Greenspan, 1981 a). Based on feedback received from colleagues, it appears that the term "social judgment" is preferable.